

Monday, August 15, 2022 at 12:23:19 Eastern Daylight Time

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**Subject:** ICYMI - Wall Street Journal: China Fumes Over Somaliland's Warm Ties With Taiwan**Date:** Monday, August 15, 2022 at 10:30:43 AM Eastern Daylight Time**From:** Adam Sharon**To:** Adam Sharon

Hello,

Knowing of your boss's interest in US-Taiwan relations, I'm reaching out to share this article below that was recently published in *The Wall Street Journal*. The piece describes the ongoing pressure that Somaliland faces from the People's Republic of China in response to its diplomatic relationship with Taiwan.

Somaliland is strategically located in the northeast corner of the Horn of Africa, adjacent to Djibouti and Ethiopia and just across the Gulf of Aden from the Arabian Peninsula. Since reclaiming its sovereign status in 1991, Somaliland has built a democratic system of government, promoted economic growth, and ensured the security of its own people in a complex region. To this end, Somaliland has sought to establish and deepen ties with those who share its values, including both Taiwan and the US. Over two years ago, Somaliland and Taiwan established representative offices in each other's capitals. This has resulted in the strengthening of a partnership through initiatives to promote economic cooperation, educational exchanges, and advance public health initiatives.

I would appreciate the chance to speak at your convenience to share more information about Somaliland, its little-known role as a beacon of democracy in the Horn of Africa, and the growing strategic partnership with Taiwan and the US (to include recent legislative developments in Congress plus DOD updates, which the article references).

Sincerely,  
Adam Sharon

#### [China Fumes Over Somaliland's Warm Ties With Taiwan](#)

*Few African regions have the nerve to say no to China. Independence-minded Somaliland is one.*

The Wall Street Journal

By Michael M. Phillips

Aug. 11, 2022 6:26 am

HARGEISA, Somaliland—Shortly after a fire destroyed the biggest market in this independence-minded region of Somalia, a senior Chinese diplomat asked permission to visit to pay his respects.

Fei Shengchao, Beijing's ambassador to Somalia, told Somaliland authorities he wanted to discuss how China could help mitigate the impact of the disaster, which devastated the local economy, and aid victims of Covid-19 and the East African drought.

As the visit approached, Mr. Fei added a few other stops to his itinerary in Hargeisa, Somaliland's capital: He wanted to meet with lawmakers. And opposition leaders. And university students.

The ambassador's requests raised immediate suspicions among Somaliland authorities. Beijing's real

agenda, they concluded, wasn't to talk emergency aid. It was to recruit local allies to sabotage Somaliland's warm diplomatic relations with Taiwan.

"It was purely political," said Essa Kayd, Somaliland's foreign minister.

Mr. Kayd told Mr. Fei he wasn't welcome. The trip never happened.

"We thought it wasn't appropriate—not because we feared anything but because it was different than the agenda we agreed upon," Mr. Kayd said in an interview.

Few African regions have the nerve to say no to China, whose state-owned companies have blanketed the continent with sprawling seaports, sleek airport terminals, smooth highways—and soaring debts.

Somaliland is one of the few, one of two remaining Taiwanese diplomatic outposts in sub-Saharan Africa.

Somaliland is "open to all bilateral relations we can have with any country, but it has to be unconditional, no strings attached," Mr. Kayd said. "We're not going to allow anyone to dictate who we can have a relationship with."

The China-Taiwan standoff that is raising tensions in the Asia-Pacific region, and pushing Washington and Beijing toward a new Cold War, is also playing out on the Horn of Africa. Somaliland, whose goal is recognition as a state independent of Somalia, has allied itself with Taiwan, whose goal is to remain separate from the People's Republic of China.

Somaliland's leaders "are not only seeking secession, but also fanning the flames to undermine the independence and unification of other countries, harming others without benefiting themselves," Mr. Fei told The Wall Street Journal. "They will only end up shooting themselves in the foot."

The ambassador declined to comment on his aborted trip to Hargeisa after the April Waheen Market fire, which caused \$1.5 billion in damage.

Meantime, the independence issue has made natural bedfellows of China, which considers Taiwan, a self-ruled island 100 miles off its coast, part of its territory, and Somalia, which feels the same way about Somaliland.

Over the weekend, Somalia's foreign ministry issued a statement in apparent response to U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's high-profile visit to Taiwan last week. Beijing responded angrily to the Pelosi visit, conducting days of military exercises around Taiwan.

Somalia "declares its full solidarity with the People's Republic of China in defending its sovereignty and territorial integrity, while affirmed its firm position to respect the one-China policy, considering Taiwan an inalienable part of China's territory," the Somali ministry said.

China has donated armored personnel carriers, ambulances, water trucks and land mine detectors to Somalia, and promised food aid, according to Beijing's embassy in Mogadishu. Earlier this year, China named a special envoy to the Horn of Africa, who in June led what Beijing described as a peace conference with governments from the region.

Staking out a position opposite to Somalia's, Somaliland parliamentarians released a statement Monday decrying China's military exercises near Taiwan "as this could destabilize the peace of the region."

Washington, meanwhile, is trying to juggle its interests in the Horn. The Pentagon operates a major base in Djibouti, Somalia's neighbor; China has its own seaside military facility just a few miles away, with enough pier space to dock an aircraft carrier.

The U.S. is deeply tied to Somalia by the never-ending war against al-Shabaab, al Qaeda's most active global affiliate, making it wary of any diplomatic move that might break up the country and weaken the fragile Mogadishu government.

President Biden recently ordered hundreds of American special operators to set up camp in Somalia to train and advise local commandos to fight al-Shabaab. Former President Donald Trump had pulled some 700 U.S. troops from the country in the final days of his term, and Mr. Biden's decision marks a reversal.

Meanwhile, the Biden administration is tempted by the strategic lure of Somaliland, which is relatively stable and relatively democratic. There is growing support in Congress for closer direct ties with Somaliland.

A former British protectorate, Somaliland secured independence on June 26, 1960, five days before Somalia became independent of Italy. The two countries unified shortly afterward, but relations soured when Somali dictator Mohamed Siad Barre bombed Hargeisa and slaughtered Somalilanders by the tens of thousands in the late 1980s.

Somaliland declared itself independent in 1991.

Famine and clan warfare soon followed throughout Somalia, events culminating in a failed U.S.-led intervention, the 1993 downing of two American Black Hawk helicopters in Mogadishu and the deaths of 18 U.S. Army Rangers, Delta Force operators and other American troops.

After a frustrating decades long quest for international recognition, Somaliland sees opportunity in Great Power competition between the U.S. and China. Somaliland leaders have offered the Pentagon use of the port and runway in Berbera, located on the shores of the Gulf of Aden, overlooking crucial sea lanes between the Indian Ocean and Suez Canal.

The alternative, Somalilanders hint darkly, is Chinese dominance of the region.

"If the world wants to give China 850 km [528 miles] of waterway to spite Somaliland, Somaliland will not be the only losers," said Edna Adan, Somaliland's former foreign minister, one-time first lady and grande dame of its independence push.

In May, Gen. Stephen Townsend, then-commander of American forces in Africa, and Larry André, the U.S. ambassador to Somalia, paid a surprise visit to Berbera to inspect the docks and runway, which once served as an emergency landing strip for the space shuttle.

The U.S. military already has access agreements for hangars and other facilities in Mombasa, Kenya; Libreville, Gabon; and Entebbe, Uganda.

“If the U.S. doesn’t do something in Somaliland, eventually you’re going to have a [Somaliland] government that can’t say no to China’s influence,” said a senior U.S. military official.

Taiwan used to have more friends in Africa. Burkina Faso, Gambia and Sao Tome and Principe switched allegiances to China over the past 10 years. Now Taipei’s remaining diplomatic partners among the 54 U.N.-recognized countries in Africa are the tiny kingdom of Eswatini, formerly known as Swaziland, and Somaliland, which swapped representatives with Taiwan in 2020. Taipei also maintains a trade office in Nigeria and two lower-level liaison offices in South Africa.

Taiwan’s office in Hargeisa resembles a two-story luxury home in a walled compound. The red-white-and-blue flag of the Republic of China—as the government in Taipei is formally known—flies outside.

The Chinese sent multiple delegations to Hargeisa to try to kill the alliance in the cradle, recalled Abdinasir Hersi, director-general of the Somaliland foreign ministry at the time. Beijing offered to build roads and airports if Somaliland shunned Taiwan.

The Somalilanders wouldn’t budge.

The Chinese were furious, Mr. Hersi recalled. Beijing was irked again when Somaliland sent an official delegation to Taiwan this year.

Taiwan stations five diplomats in Hargeisa, as well as technical experts in health, agriculture, fisheries and other areas. During the Covid-19 crisis, Taiwan provided Somaliland with vaccines, oxygen generators, testing equipment, ventilators and ambulances.

“It is a geopolitical chess-piece-in-waiting,” said Ambassador Allen Chenwa Lou, Taiwan’s top representative in Hargeisa.

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